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ABSTRACT

Recent work in word-order typology has demonstrated that the dominant order of verbs and objects (or complements) correlates well with the general ordering tendencies of languages. The work on German reported in this paper suggests, however, that certain traits, such as the order of adverbials, are influenced not only by general ordering tendencies, but also by the order of verb and object in a particular clause. Although OV-related adverbial order is the dominant order, VO-related adverbial order also occurs in main clauses, provided that the clause does not end in a participle, infinitive, or separable verb prefix. That is, the presence of a verbal element after the object seems to block VO-related adverbial order in main clauses as well as in verb-last dependent clauses, while a simple finite main verb in second position--before its object--allows both orders to occur. The conclusion that certain traits are affected by verb position in a given clause, as well as by general ordering tendencies in a language, is also supported by the behavior of gapping in German. Both forward and backward gapping occur in dependent clauses, but VO-related forward gapping is judged ungrammatical by native speakers if it leaves a nonfinite main verb in final position. (Author)

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Verb position and the order of adverbials in German

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Abstract

Recent work in word-order typology has demonstrated that the dominant order of verbs and objects (or complements) correlates well with the general ordering tendencies of languages. The work on German reported in this paper suggests, however, that certain traits, such as the order of adverbials, are influenced not only by general ordering tendencies, but also by the order of verb and object in a particular clause. Although OV-related adverbial order is the dominant order, VO-related adverbial order also occurs in main clauses, provided that the clause does not end in a participle, infinitive, or separable verb prefix. That is, the presence of a verbal element after the object seems to block VO-related adverbial order in main clauses as well as in verb-last dependent clauses, while a simple finite main verb in second position--before its object--allows both orders to occur.

The conclusion that certain traits are affected by verb position in a given clause, as well as by general ordering tendencies in a language, is also supported by the behavior of gapping in German. Both forward and backward gapping occur in dependent clauses, but VO-related forward gapping is judged ungrammatical by native speakers if it leaves a nonfinite main verb in final position.

1. The starting point of the recent work in word-order typology, which was initiated by Greenberg (1966) and expanded by Lehmann, Vennemann, and others, is the fact that languages in which verbs usually precede their objects (or complements) tend to order other sentence elements in a certain way, while languages in which the dominant order is object-verb tend to order other elements in the opposite way. For example, in verb-object, or VO, languages, one generally finds that a preposition precedes its object, a noun precedes its modifiers, auxiliaries precede the main verb, and adjectives precede the standard of comparison. In OV languages the reverse tends to be true: postpositions follow their objects, nouns follow their modifiers, auxiliaries follow main verbs, and adjectives follow the standard of comparison. Languages that display all or most of the ordering characteristics associated with VO or OV order are said by Lehmann (1973) to be 'consistent' VO or OV languages.

Both Lehmann (1973) and Vennemann (1973, Bartsch and Vennemann 1972) posit a basic structural principle that states, in effect, that languages have a strong tendency toward consistency in word-order type and that historical change in typological characteristics will be in the direction of greater consistency, as long as the

dominant order of verbs and objects remains the same. Inconsistent languages are to be understood as languages that are in the process of changing from one word-order type to the other.

In the study of word-order typology, the German language offers an unusual opportunity to test the principle of consistent ordering. Not only does it have a fairly well-documented history of over 1000 years with various word orders, but also--and more important--modern German gives the typological scholar a chance to examine a language in which even the order of verbs and objects is inconsistent. In simple sentences and main clauses, the German verb comes in first or second position, usually preceding its object or complement, but in most dependent clauses the verb is in final position, following its object. Furthermore, in compound tenses the main verb--in the form of an infinitive or participle--follows its object or complement even in main clauses. As one might expect in such a complex situation, the language displays both VO- and OV-related traits, although--as I showed in my dissertation (Dean 1974)--characteristics related to VO order are somewhat more numerous than those related to OV order.

With its variable verb position, German also offers an opportunity to study a question that, to my knowledge, has not been raised previously in typological studies, namely, whether some typological traits are influenced not only by general ordering tendencies in a language but also by the order of object and verb

in a particular clause. This is a difficult question to investigate--even in a language with variable verb position. Most typological traits are basically fixed--as in the order of nouns and modifiers in German--and even among variable traits the order may be governed by pragmatic considerations, such as the order of topic and comment or old and new information. Other variable traits may occur so rarely that one needs an impossibly large corpus in order to produce results that are statistically significant. The order of adverbials in German, however, is one typological trait that offers promise to the investigator. First, the order is, at least to some extent, variable; second, sentences with more than one adverbial occur in abundance; and third, as verb modifiers, adverbs are more likely to have their order influenced by verb position than by pragmatic considerations such as topic and comment.

2. According to Bartsch and Vennemann (1972), the order of adverbials in a language is determined, or at least influenced, by the dominant order of verb and object in that language. In VO languages such as English, the verb is followed by the adverbial that is most closely bound to the verb semantically; then that verb-adverb combination is in turn followed and modified by the second adverbial, and so forth, as in sentence 1:

V A1 A2

(1) We eat slowly on Sunday.

The verb eat is first modified by an adverb of manner, slowly, which can be labeled A1. Then the basic activity of eating slowly is further modified by a time adverbial, on Sunday, labeled A2. Thus the normal order for a VO language such as English is V-A1-A2-A3 and so forth. If the order of adverbials is reversed, however, the result is an odd sentence:

V A2 A1

(2) We eat on Sunday slowly.

In a consistent OV language like Japanese, on the other hand, the normal order is A2-A1-V, the opposite of that in English:

A2 A1 V

(3) Nichiyoobi ni wa yukkuri taberu.
'Sunday on slowly eat'

When one looks at German, however, with its variable order of verbs and objects, one finds both VO and OV adverbial order, although the OV-related order is more frequent. In fact, Bartsch and Vennemann (1972:137) point out that only the OV-related order is acceptable in German dependent clauses. Thus only the first of the following sentences is acceptable:

A2 A1 V

(4) Ich weiss, dass Hans wegen des Tadels sorgfältig schreibt.
'I know that Hans writes carefully because of the reprimand.'

A1 A2 V

(5) *Ich weiss, dass Hans sorgfältig wegen des Tadels schreibt.

'I know that Hans writes because of the reprimand carefully.'

The second sentence, like its English gloss, is very strange and could only be interpreted as something like 'I know that Hans is careful to write because of the reprimand (and not for some other reason)'.

In German main clauses, on the other hand, both orders are acceptable:

V A1 A2

(6) Hans schreibt sorgfältig wegen des Tadels.

V A2 A1

(7) Hans schreibt wegen des Tadels sorgfältig.

These facts seem to indicate that the OV-related A2-A1 order is the dominant order in German, since it is permitted in both types of clauses, while the VO-related order, A1-A2, is allowed only in main clauses. VO adverbial order is apparently acceptable in main clauses because it results in a consistent V-A1-A2 pattern.

One might ask, then, why VO adverbial order is unacceptable in dependent clauses, even though it is allowed in main clauses. The only significant difference between the two types of clauses seems to be the position of the finite verb. This suggests that the

VO-related pattern may be permissible only in constructions in which the verb precedes its object (or complement), while that order is blocked in all constructions in which the verb follows its object. It suggests, in other words, that OV adverbial order may be the only acceptable order not only in verb-final dependent clauses, but also in other constructions where a verbal element comes at the end--for example, in infinitival and participial phrases, extended modifiers, and even in main clauses that end with an infinitive or past participle.

To test this hypothesis, I examined a corpus of contemporary German, isolating 254 constructions in which pairs of adverbials occurred. Each pair was then analyzed to determine whether it had the OV-related A2-A1 or the VO-related A1-A2 order. The dominance of the OV-related order is reflected in the fact that all but 30, or approximately 88 percent, of the pairs of adverbials had A2-A1 order. Actually, there was some variation in the percentage of OV-related adverbials according to the style of the text. Two of the six texts, consisting of short-story dialog, and a newspaper article from Die Zeit had OV adverbial percentages between 81.5 and 84.4, while the three remaining texts, all representing written style, had OV percentages of 91.9 to 92.7.

In the next step all of the adverbial pairs were tabulated according to four types of construction: (1) main clauses with finite main verbs (in first or second position), (2) main clauses

ending with nonfinite main verbs, (3) verb-final dependent clauses, and (4) verb-final phrases (participial and infinitival phrases, extended modifiers). The results of that tabulation are given in table 1, which gives, first of all, the number of OV and VO pairs in each type of construction. These numbers are expressed then as a percentage of the total number of OV or VO adverbials and finally as a percentage of the total number of adverbials in each type of construction. Table 1 shows that adverbial pairs with the VO-related A1-A2 order are much less likely to occur in verb-final contexts than are adverbials with the OV-related A2-A1 order. Slightly over half of the OV pairs occurred in verb-final constructions, while only 3, or 10 percent, of the VO pairs appeared in such an environment. Viewed from a different perspective, only 2.6 percent of the adverbial pairs in verb-final constructions had VO-related order, while almost 20 percent of the pairs in non-verb-final contexts had that order. It should be noted that all three of the VO pairs that occurred in verb-final constructions were found in the same text, the newspaper article mentioned above. In the other five texts, not a single VO pair occurred in a verb-final environment.

Another interesting result was produced when the adverbial pairs in main clauses with finite main verbs were divided into two subcategories according to whether the clause ended with a separable verb prefix. There were 21 adverbial pairs that occurred

Type of construction	Number of adverbial pairs		Percentage of OV or VO total		Percentage of each type	
	OV	VO	OV	VO	OV	VO
1. Main clause/finite main verb	111	27	49.6	90.0	80.4	19.6
2. Main clause/final main verb	56	2	25.0	6.7	96.6	3.4
3. Dependent clause	52	1	23.2	3.3	98.1	1.9
4. Verb-final phrase	5	0	2.2	0	100	0
Total verb-final (2-4)	113	3	50.4	10.0	97.4	2.6
Total (1-4)	224	30	100	100	88.2	11.8

Table 1. OV and VO adverbial pairs in four types of constructions.

in main clauses with a finite main verb and a separable prefix at the end, but only one of the 21 had VO-related order, as shown in table 2. This compares with 26 VO pairs out of 117 clauses that did not have separable prefixes. Thus the occurrence in final position of even the verbal particle known as the separable prefix seems to have a blocking effect on the use of VO-related adverbial order.

These data, in short, seem to support the hypothesis that the order of verb and object in a particular clause may influence the order of other elements in that clause. It also suggests that in determining the dominant order of verbs and objects in a language in which main verbs and auxiliaries do not always appear near each other, it is the position of the main verb that is typologically significant--whether it is finite or nonfinite--and not the position of the finite auxiliary.

3. The results achieved by analyzing the order of adverbials are also supported by the behavior in German of the phenomenon known as 'gapping'. As noted by Ross (1970), verb-object languages generally gap only in a forward direction, as in the following sentence:

(8) I ate fish, and Bill rice.

OV languages like Japanese, however, have backward gapping:[1]

	OV	VO	Total
With separable prefix	20	1	21
Without separable prefix	91	26	117

Table 2. Adverbial pairs in main clauses with finite main verbs.

(9) Watakusi wa sakana o, Biru wa gohan o tabeta.

'I fish Bill rice ate'

Since German has both verb-object and object-verb order, one might expect it to have both forward and backward gapping, and it does. As Ross (1970:256, 258) points out, only forward gapping is acceptable in German main clauses, but both forward and backward gapping occur in dependent clauses. Thus there are three possible patterns in German: SVO + SO in main clauses and either SOV + SO or SO + SOV in dependent clauses.

In order to check the accuracy of Ross's statements about gapping in German, I questioned two native speakers and found that in general Ross is correct. First, my informants were asked to judge the following sentences that exhibit the three patterns of gapping:

(10a) Hans trinkt Kaffee, und Heidi Tee.

'Hans drinks coffee, and Heidi tea.'

(10b) Ich weiss, dass Hans Kaffee trinkt und Heidi Tee.

(10c) Ich weiss, dass Hans Kaffee und Heidi Tee trinkt.

All three sentences were judged to be grammatically correct, but the informants had a personal preference for sentence 10b over 10c; that is, forward gapping was preferred to backward gapping in

dependent clauses, although one informant suggested that sentence 10c was more elegant or formal.

The second group of sentences involved a modal auxiliary with an infinitive, both of which were deleted in gapping:

(11a) Hans soll zum Postamt gehen, und Heidi zur Bäckerei.
'Hans is supposed to go to the post office, and Heidi to the bakery.'

(11b) Ich weiss, dass Hans zum Postamt gehen soll und Heidi zur Bäckerei.

(11c) Ich weiss, dass Hans zum Postamt und Heidi zur Bäckerei gehen soll.

The judgments on the second group of sentences were not significantly different from those on the first group.

The third group, however, elicited a different response. In this group the auxiliary was the same in the two clauses, but the infinitive was different, thus allowing only the auxiliary to be deleted:

(12a) Hans soll zu Fuss gehen, und Heidi mit dem Rad fahren.
'Hans is supposed to go on foot, and Heidi ride on the bicycle.'

(12b) Ich weiss, dass Hans zu Fuss gehen soll und Heidi mit dem Rad fahren.

(12c) Ich weiss, dass Hans zu Fuss gehen und Heidi mit dem Rad fahren soll.

Although 12b was based on the same pattern as 10b and 11b, and although the informants showed some preference for 10b and 11b over 10c and 11c, sentence 12b was nevertheless unacceptable.[2] It was described as being very colloquial and giving the feeling that the last part was added as an afterthought. One informant indicated that the oddness of sentence 12b was due to the fact that the infinitive fahren had been left dangling by itself without the expected finite verb that would normally follow it and end the sentence. In other words the potential presence of the verb fahren in final position seems to block the VO-related forward gapping in the same way that final verbal elements discourage VO adverbial order. Thus the behavior of gapping in German provides further evidence that the order of verbs and objects influences the order of other elements not only in general but also in particular clauses.

4. In the work of Lehmann and Vennemann, the principle of consistent ordering in languages has been supported mainly with comparative and historical evidence. The comparative evidence is provided by correlations of the type Greenberg (1966) noted in his

well-known article on 'Some universals of grammar with particular reference to the order of meaningful elements'. The historical evidence comes from documented changes in verb-object order that have, sooner or later, resulted in changes in the order of other elements. Nevertheless, both Lehmann (1972a, 1972b) and Vennemann (Bartsch and Vennemann 1972) operate with item-process types of grammar and see the principle of consistent ordering as a force that acts synchronically in the process of moving from an unordered semantic structure to an ordered syntactic string. The significance of the behavior of adverbial order and gapping in German is that it provides a third, synchronic dimension to the evidence supporting the principle of consistent ordering. At the same time, it also provides additional support for item-process views of grammar.

NOTES

[1] Maling (1972) and Hankamer (1972) argue that backward gapping is actually a form of conjunction reduction and not part of a mirror-image gapping rule. The question of one rule or two, however, does not affect the correlation of forward and backward gapping with VO and OV languages, respectively.

[2] This restriction on forward gapping is also noted by Maling (1972:106-7).

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